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Mixed Marriages of Poles in England and Wales, 2007–2020: A Preliminary Sociological Analysis

Abstract

The aim of the article is to present the scale and characteristics of the phenomenon of church marriages by Poles who migrated to England and Wales. The phenomenon of heterogamous relationships has grown over the last several decades due to factors such as the expansion of the community of European Union member states, globalization processes, and the resulting diversity of the population of migrants. The article is focused mainly on religious mixed marriages. The empirical material consisted of data from the records of the largest organization of the Polish community in Britain. The authors analysed the data of 25,530 marriages of Poles living in England and Wales, registered between 2007 and 2020, including 2,922 mixed religions marriages.

Keywords

Mixed marriages, binational marriages, cross-cultural marriages, Poles in England and Wales, Polish migrants.

1. Introduction

Looking for a spouse “on the global marriage market” fits the logic of the global empire of post-modernity¹, in which the processes taking place are no longer universal and one-dimensional. An increasingly frequent phenomenon is ethnically, racially, culturally, nationally, or religiously mixed marriages. The phenomenon of people entering into marriages referred to as mixed has been attracting the interest of scholars from various disciplines, particularly sociology, demographic studies, and psychology.

2. Terminological pluralism

In research publications devoted to mixed marriages a certain terminological ambiguity can be observed. An attempt to define mixed marriage precisely sparks a heated debate among the scholars investigating the phenomenon. From the perspective of the Catholic religion, which is dominant in Poland, it is possible to distinguish three groups of “religiously or denominationally mixed marriages.”² The first two are: *mixed marriages* in the strict sense, when the spouses are Christians of different denominations³, and mixed marriages in a broad sense, called *disparity of cult marriages*, mainly between Christians and unbaptized people.⁴ What requires a separate explanation is the third category – namely, marriage to a person who has abandoned the Catholic faith⁵: marriage between a practicing Catholic and a person baptized in the Catholic Church whose faith was shaken, weakened, or lost.⁶

¹ J. Stala, *New Challenges for the Catholic Vision of the Vocation of Women and Men*, “The Person and the Challenges” 9/2 (2019), p. 137.

² L. Adamowicz, *Wybrane problemy katolickiego prawa małżeńskiego w kontekście emigracji w wielokulturowej Europie*, “Roczniki Nauk Prawnych” 19/2 (2009), p. 156.

³ I. B. Waters, *The Catholic Church, and Mixed Marriage*, in: A. W. Abe (ed.), *Mixed Marriages: Catholic/Non-Catholic Marriages in Australia*, Melbourne 2005.

⁴ P. Boonphao, *Canonical Considerations in Pastoral Care of Persons in Marriages Between Roman Catholics and Buddhists in Thailand*, Ottawa 2020.

⁵ H. Stawniak, *Forma zawarcia małżeństwa mieszanego*, „Prawo Kanoniczne” 62/2 (2019), p. 100.

⁶ E. Czykwin, *Małżeństwa prawosławno-katolickie w perspektywie badawczej*, in: M. Bieńkowska, W. Żelazny (eds.), *Pogranicza. Księga Jubileuszowa profesora Andrzeja Sadowskiego*, Białystok 2015, p. 246.

The practice of the Polish Catholic Mission in England and Wales (PCMEW), the largest organization of the Polish community in the UK, whose tasks include preparing the marriage documentation of Catholics living in England or Wales, shows that a marriage between a practicing Catholic and a Catholic who was baptized but declares themselves as a nonbeliever or as non-practicing is treated as a mixed marriage in the strict sense. By contrast, a marriage between a practicing Catholic and an apostate Catholic (i.e., one who has formally defected from the Catholic Church) and a marriage of a practicing Catholic to a Catholic who has committed heresy or schism⁷ – an informal or formal apostasy – are treated by the PCMEW as cases of a disparity of cult marriage. It should be noted, however, that from the formal point of view this kind of marriage should be categorized as a mixed marriage in the strict sense, in accordance with the principle of *semel catholicus, semper catholicus* (“once a Catholic, always a Catholic”), invoked in “Omnium in mentem.”⁸

Sometimes there are situations in which a Catholic, despite having formally defected from the Catholic Church, marries a member of a Church (e.g., the Orthodox Church) or an ecclesiastical community that is not in full communion with the Catholic Church (e.g., the Church of England). This kind of marriage should also be treated as a mixed marriage in the strict sense of the term. This is also a consequence of the revision of the legal regulation promulgated in 2010 in the document titled “Omnium in mentem.”⁹ In other words, despite having formally defected from or informally left the Catholic Church, a Catholic remains a Catholic, and his or her marriage to a person who is a member of a church or an ecclesiastical community which is not in full communion with the Catholic Church should be treated as a mixed marriage in the strict sense of the term. And yet, as mentioned above, the PCMEW classifies such cases a little more rigorously, reserving the category of mixed marriages in the strict sense almost exclusively for cases of a Catholic marrying a non-Catholic Christian whose baptism is recognized by the

⁷ D. Borek, *Przestępstwa przeciwko wierze w normach “De Delictis Revervatis” z 2010 roku*, „Prawo Kanoniczne” 57/3 (2014), p. 105.

⁸ A. Pastwa, *Forma kanoniczna małżeństw mieszanych w świetle motu proprio „Omnium in mentem” i nowszych uregulowań Stolicy Apostolskiej*, „Studia Oecumenica” 11 (2011); P. Majer, L. Adamowicz, *Praktyczny komentarz do dekretu ogólnego Konferencji Episkopatu Polski o przeprowadzaniu rozmów kanoniczno-duszpasterskich z narzeczonymi przed zawarciem małżeństwa kanonicznego z dnia 08 października 2019 roku*, Sandomierz 2021.

⁹ H. Stawniak, *Forma zawarcia małżeństwa...*, p. 101.

Episcopate of England and Wales, or cases of a Catholic marrying a non-practicing Catholic who has not committed an act of apostasy. In other cases, this largest institution of the Polish community in the UK treats interfaith marriages as disparity of cult marriages.

3. Aim of the present study

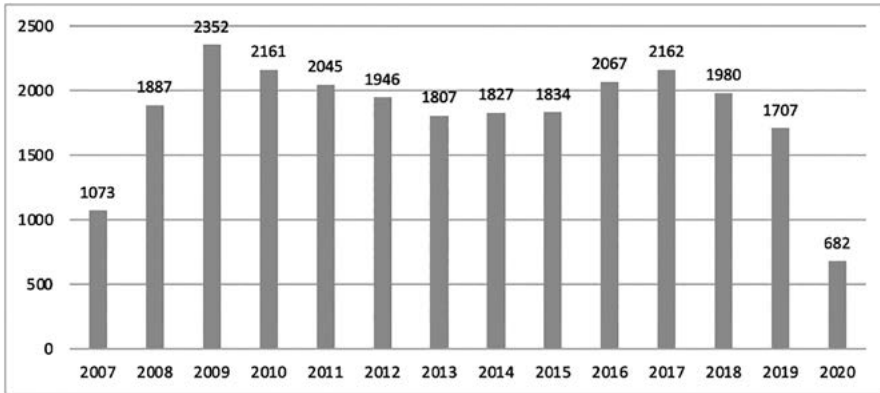
The aim of this article is to provide recent data on the number of church marriages by Poles settled in England and Wales in the years 2007–2020 and to determine the number of interfaith marriages among them. The article is also an attempt to answer the question about the reasons why people marry outside their religion or denomination. Using the nonreactive sociological research method, we analysed a total of 25,530 premarital documents dated between 2007 and 2020. The analysis revealed 5,426 marriage records that met the criterion of the presence of selected differences in prospective spouses' choice of partners. In the cases examined, one of the spouses had to jointly meet three criteria: being a Pole, being a Catholic, and entering a church marriage.

When selecting the variables, we chose the fact of entering a mixed marriage as the central variable. In the course of further categorization we distinguished *mixed marriages* and *disparity of cult marriages*. Additionally, we distinguished convalidated marriages. This category included marital relationships that had existed as civil marriages at the time when the religious marriage was performed.

4. Results

From 2007 until 2020, the PCMEW recorded a total of 25,530 marriages by Poles living in England or Wales. Figure 1 presents their numbers according to specific years.

Figure 1. The number of marriages by Polish migrants settled in England and Wales



Source: Polish Catholic Mission in England and Wales (authors' calculations)

The marriage rate was the highest for cases of religiously homogenous marriages, and nearly one marriage in nine was a mixed one. In the category of mixed marriages, 59.2% were between a Catholic and a baptized non-Catholic, while 40.8% were between a Catholic and a person of a non-Christian religion or a nonbeliever. The highest number of mixed marriages between people of Christian denominations was in the year 2008, and the lowest number was in the year 2018. Marriages to non-Christians or nonbelievers were commonest in 2012 and least frequent in 2017. With regards to religious and denominational homogeneity, marriages between partners of the same religion (between Catholics) were the most frequent in the last four years analysed (2017–2020). The highest rate of such marriages was reported in 2013. Detailed data are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Marriages by Polish migrants in the UK

	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	Total
Catholic-Catholic marriages	N	793	1485	1878	1666	1583	1500	1369	1445	1608	1782	1643	1393	562	20104
	%	73.9%	78.7%	79.8%	77.1%	77.4%	77.1%	75.8%	79.1%	77.8%	82.4%	83.0%	81.6%	82.4%	78.7%
Catholic-Catholic convalidated marriages	N	139	188	209	217	196	194	166	199	224	198	173	152	55	2504
	%	13.0%	10.0%	8.9%	10.0%	9.6%	10.0%	9.1%	10.9%	10.8%	9.2%	8.7%	8.9%	8.1%	9.8%
Catholic-non-Catholic mixed marriages	N	69	92	113	117	106	101	103	98	96	84	73	68	30	1260
	%	6.4%	4.9%	4.8%	5.4%	5.2%	5.2%	6.1%	5.3%	4.6%	3.9%	3.7%	4.0%	4.4%	4.9%
Catholic-non-Catholic convalidated mixed marriages	N	14	32	35	55	49	39	34	36	40	31	27	37	9	471
	%	1.3%	1.7%	1.5%	2.5%	2.4%	2.0%	1.9%	2.0%	1.9%	1.4%	1.4%	2.2%	1.3%	1.8%
Catholic-non-Christian convalidated disparity of cult marriages	N	53	64	84	59	58	75	48	60	68	45	37	36	12	749
	%	4.9%	3.4%	3.6%	2.7%	2.8%	3.9%	2.7%	3.3%	3.3%	2.1%	1.9%	2.1%	1.8%	2.9%
Catholic-non-Christian convalidated disparity of cult marriages	N	5	26	33	47	53	37	52	44	31	22	27	21	14	442
	%	0.5%	1.4%	1.4%	2.2%	2.6%	1.9%	2.9%	2.4%	1.5%	1.0%	1.4%	1.2%	2.1%	1.7%
TOTAL	N	1073	1887	2352	2161	2045	1946	1807	1834	2067	2162	1980	1707	682	25530
	%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Source: Polish Catholic Mission in England and Wales (authors' calculations)

An interesting category to examine is convalidated marriages. The Code of Canon Law distinguishes two forms of convalidation: simple (*convalidatio simplex*) and extraordinary, more specifically referred to as radical sanation in marriage – *sanatio in radice*.¹⁰ The difference between them consists in the fact that in *sanatio in radice* marriage convalidation is based on prior, formerly given marital consent, whereas in *convalidatio simplex* formalities are settled in such a way that the relationship acquires legal validity. The issue in this case is the religious consequences of the denomination or religion in which the marriage is convalidated.¹¹ The cases explored in this article are ones of simple convalidation, understood as the canonical validation of an already existing civil marriage from the perspective of the Catholic religion.

Of all the marriages analysed, nearly one in eight had been formalized under civil law (13.3%), of which one convalidation in ten concerned a marriage between Catholics. Marriage convalidations in which both partners were Catholic took place most often in 2007 and least often in 2020. In the case of mixed marriages between partners of Christian denominations, the highest convalidation rates were reported in the years 2010–2011. Civil marriages and religiously validated marriages between Catholics and non-Christians (or nonbelievers) were most common in 2013 and least common in 2007. Three convalidated marriages in four were religiously homogamous (73.3%) and one in four was religiously mixed (*mixed marriages* – 13.8%; *disparity of cult marriages* – 12.9%).

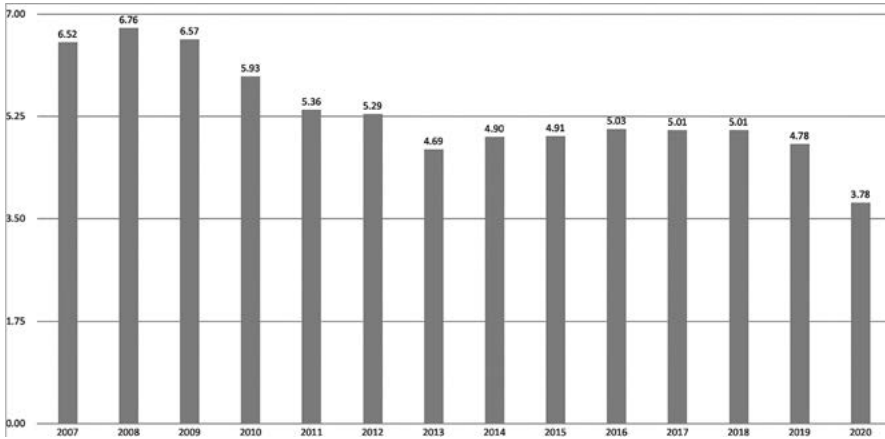
5. Analysis

The analysis of the module of marriages registered in the years 2007–2020 by Polish migrants living in England and Wales yields a sinusoidal graph. The number of new marriages was the highest in 2009 and 2017 and lowest in 2007 and 2020. The result of the analysis of the trend visible in the number of marriages by Polish migrants living in the UK coincides with the demographic curve showing the rate of marriages registered in Poland per 1,000 people (except in 2007). The marriage rate in Poland in specific years is presented in Figure 2.

¹⁰ K. E. Boccafolo, *Invalid Convalidation: A Legitimate Autonomous Ground of Marriage Nullity*, "Jurist" 74 (2014).

¹¹ A. Bartczak, *Konvalidacja małżeństwa kanonicznego*, „Acta Universitatis Lodziensis. Folia Iuridica” 81 (2017), pp. 7–8.

Figure 2. Marriages per 1,000 people in Poland



Source: Statistics Poland (GUS), <https://bdl.stat.gov.pl/bdl/dane/podgrup/temat>

What seems interesting from a research point of view is the attempt to answer the question of why is it that marriages to partners from a Christian background of various Christian denominations are dominant among Polish mixed marriages in England and Wales. Statistical analyses show quite clearly that Poles who lived in the UK at the time of their marrying, who decided to marry a person of a different denomination or religion, more often than not chose a partner from a Christian background rather than from among unbaptized people.

What may contribute to such decisions is anxiety about cultural differences, for example ones concerning ways of fulfilling oneself in marriage, in the family, or – generally speaking – in the style of living daily life. Nevertheless, despite the multiplicity of forms of married and family life, the institution of marriage continues to be the most often chosen form of common life and is not regarded by European society as outdated.¹² In the analysed cases of mixed marriages there is a certain likelihood of divergent views on numerous issues associated with partners living together. However, individuals deciding to enter into a mixed relationship are not particularly reluctant to formalize it in both the civil and the religious sense. The dissimilarity or even incompatibility of partners' views can be a challenge for them; it can be a significant factor disrupting communication

¹² J. Baniak, *Małżeństwo i rozwody w świadomości młodzieży polskiej przełomu XX i XXI wieku w świetle badań socjologicznych*, „Studia Koszalińsko-Koło-brzeskie” 28 (2021), p. 290.

and, as a result, it may lead to difficulties in solving the problems that occur in married or family life.¹³ At the interface of two cultural systems, including axiological ones, individuals may experience a certain disparity of norms shaping their future.¹⁴ According to Habermas¹⁵, “religious consciousness must, first, come to terms with the cognitive dissonance of encountering other denominations or religions.” This means that, in their choice of spouse for a mixed marriage, people will, quite naturally, strive to find the greatest possible “common ground,” despite the difference of religion or denomination. This would explain the more frequent choice of a Christian partner in mixed marriages. Marital relations encompass nearly every aspect of a person’s life, and the affinity of values and religious beliefs increases the likelihood that the marriage will survive and last.¹⁶

In the case of choosing a partner from outside Christian denominations, fears may be intensified by other external factors. There has been a perceptible worldwide increase in the phenomenon of some monotheistic religions focusing on the fundamentalist model of their identity.¹⁷ A form of polarization is taking place and an increase in a tendency to radicalization is observed.¹⁸ For example, in some geographical areas the fundamentalist strand of the Muslim religion has recently been gaining ground, giving rise to the so-called new Islam.¹⁹ This phenomenon is noticeable, for instance, in the second and third generations living in Britain and in other countries of Western Europe. The revivalist Islam is characterized by dissociation from specific ethnic cultures and by an

¹³ M. Jodłowska-Herudzińska, *Kwestie doboru małżeńskiego w międzykulturowych małżeństwach mieszanych*, „Roczniki Socjologii Rodziny” 14 (2002), p. 178.

¹⁴ R. Kaczmarczyk, *System aksjologiczny muzułmanów – wyzwanie czy element wspólnej kultury Europy?*, „Rocznik Europeistyczny” 3 (2017), p. 65.

¹⁵ J. Habermas, *Glauben und Wissen: Rede zum Friedenspreis des Deutschen Buchhandels 2001*, Frankfurt/M. 2016, p. 65.

¹⁶ J. Van Niekerk, M. Verkuyten, *Interfaith Marriage Attitudes in Muslim Majority Countries: A Multilevel Approach*, “The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion” 28/4 (2018).

¹⁷ M. S. Abbas, *‘I grew a beard and my dad flipped out!’ Co-option of British Muslim Parents in Countering ‘Extremism’ Within Their Families in Bradford and Leed*, “Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies” 45/9 (2019).

¹⁸ S. Obirek, *Religia w kontekście postsekularnym*, in: U. Kurczewska, M. Głowania, W. Ogrodnik, D. Wasilewski (eds.), *Co się dzieje z polskim społeczeństwem? Księga jubileuszowa dedykowana Profesorowi Ireneuszowi Krzemińskiemu*, Warszawa 2019, pp. 181–182.

¹⁹ S. Aarvik, *‘Spiritualized Islam’: Reconfigurations of Islamic Dogma Among Young Non-Organized Muslims in Norway*, “Islam and Christian – Muslim Relations” 32/1 (2021).

orientation towards reconstructing the global Muslim community based on clear Koranic principles.²⁰ Muslim-Christian marriages may therefore be perceived as problematic. This may be the reason behind the greater scepticism about entering into such relationships in favour of more culturally proximate religiously mixed marriages.²¹

6. Conclusions

Mixed relationships account for 11.5% of Catholic church marriages by Poles settled in the UK. The sociological analysis presented above leads to the conclusion that the majority of Polish Catholics in England and Wales entering into church marriages tended to seek a prospective spouse from a background of traditional European religions. This may have been a sign of anxiety about the partner's different mentality or even about the emergence of marital conflicts stemming from different socialization models. However, the fact that people enter into mixed marriages can be regarded as a positive phenomenon, indicating a relatively high degree of social integration despite the difference in religion or denomination.

Although marital and family relations are among the strongest, religious differences are a problem area in mixed marriages. In this kind of marital choice, as in any other, what prospective spouses need is prudence and maturity.²² In mixed marriages there may be different views on the functioning of the family, the upbringing of children, the rights and duties, and the division of roles in the marriage or, more broadly, in the family. In addition, there is the question of accepting cultural or religious otherness not only within the marriage. Acceptance, or the lack of it, will also concern the community of close families of both spouses.²³ From this perspective, it seems interesting to further explore the issues of mixed marriages in the light of the marital selection theory.

²⁰ R. Kashyap, V. A. Lewis, *British Muslim Youth and Religious Fundamentalism: A quantitative Investigation*, "Ethnic and Racial Studies" 36/12 (2013).

²¹ I. Nolte, 'At least I am married': *Muslim-Christian Marriage and Gender in Southwest Nigeria*, "Social Anthropology" 28/2 (2020).

²² K. Lenart-Kłoś, *Stwierdzenie nieważności małżeństwa. Próba ujęcia zjawiska na przykładzie diecezji lubelskiej*, in: A. Zadroga, K. Sawicki (eds.), *Człowiek – Społeczeństwo – Gospodarka. Perspektywa odpowiedzialności społecznej*, Lublin 2013, p. 141.

²³ M. Biedroń, *Problemy małżeństw binacjonalnych...*, p. 104.

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